

SARS Fact Sheet

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| What is SARS ? | Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is caused by a virus similar to the viruses that cause colds. The first report of SARS in people was in 2003, with an outbreak in China that quickly spread to other countries. Most people with SARS will develop pneumonia. Based on the limited experience of the original outbreak in February, 2003, many people had only a mild illness. However, SARS can cause death in over 9% of the people who contract the virus. |
| What are the symptoms? | Initial symptoms of SARS resemble those of the flu, with a fever, usually over 100.4, a headache and body aches, and sometimes coughing or other respiratory symptom, and diarrhea. From 2 – 7 days after symptoms start, people develop a dry cough and pneumonia. A key element in diagnosing SARS is a visit to a location where cases have been confirmed, or exposure to someone with the virus. Many people experience only mild symptoms. |
| How long does it take from the time of infection until the symptoms begin? | From 2 – 7 days, although it could be as long as 10 days from being exposed to the virus. |
| How is SARS treated? | <p>SARS is caused by a virus, so antibiotics are not effective. At present, there is no proven effective anti-viral treatment for SARS. Many people with SARS have mild symptoms and can be helped with rest, drinking lots of fluids, and taking aspirin or acetaminophen for fever or pain. Other people will need to be admitted to a hospital where they receive the same supportive treatment as they would for viral pneumonia, such as IV fluids and breathing assistance.</p> <p>Anyone who is thought to have SARS will be placed in an isolation environment, either at home or in a hospital, to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. Close contacts of those people who might have SARS will be asked to remain in quarantine, most often at home, for up to 7 days after exposure to restrict their activities and contact with other people, again, to prevent the possible spread of the disease.</p> |
| How do people catch this disease? | SARS is most commonly spread by close, personal, contact with someone who has been infected with the virus. It is believed that contact with respiratory droplets when someone coughs or sneezes is the most common way the virus is spread. Key to catching the disease is travel to a location where cases of SARS have recently been confirmed, or close contact with someone who has traveled to one of those locations. Based, again, on the limited experience of the February, 2003 outbreak, healthcare settings such as hospitals represent a key risk for exposure, representing over 50% of all the cases. |
| How long are people infectious (able to spread the disease)? | It may be that people are only infectious while they have symptoms. But, as the disease is very new and every effort is being taken to control the spread of the virus the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is that anyone with SARS restrict their activities for 10 days after the symptoms have gone away. |
| What can be done to prevent this disease? | Like most infectious diseases, good hand washing, often, is key. Another key element to reducing the spread of SARS is the isolation of people with the disease, and the quarantine of people who may have been exposed. These are proven measures that have successfully been used to control other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis (TB), typhoid fever, and smallpox. |
| Is the public at risk? | At present, the only people at risk are those that have traveled to a location that has confirmed cases of SARS, or have been exposed to someone who has traveled to one of those locations and then became sick. |